

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 00404 01 OF 03 311710Z
ACTION NEA-10

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O P 311600Z JAN 77
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2887
INFO SIT-REP COLLECTIVE PRIORITY 210
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER
USNMR SHAPE BELGIUM
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CINCUSAFE RAMSTEIN AB GER
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CINCUSAREUR HEIDELBERG GER
USDOCOSOUTH NAPLES IT

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 BEIRUT 0404

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MILI, PINS, PINT, LE
SUBJECT: LEBANESE SITUATION JANUARY 29-31

REF: BEIRUT 0368 (DTG 281403Z JAN 77)

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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 00404 01 OF 03 311710Z

1. SUMMARY. FIGHTING BETWEEN PALESTINIANS AND CHRISTIANS
NEAR NABATIYAH ON JAN 29. THE LEBANESE PRESS HAS CLAIMED THAT
WASHINGTON HAD GIVEN BEIRUT "GUARANTEES" THAT ISRAEL WOULD NOT
ATTACK THE SOUTH. THE QUADRIPARTITE COMMITTEE MET ON JAN 29
AND REPORTEDLY PROMISED THAT LEBANESE AUTHORITIES COULD
ESTABLISH A "PRESENCE" IN PALESTINIAN CAMPS. THE ASF FOILED
AN ATTEMPT TO BLOW UP THE CITY HALL IN SIDON ON JAN 28.

ALMOST ALL PAPERS HAVE REPORTED THAT THE FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTER AND A "SOVIET EMISSARY" WOULD SOON VISIT LEBANON IN ADDITION TO SECRETARY OF STATE VANCE. CHRISTIAN LEADERS MET AGAIN ON JAN 28 AND PROPOSED A COLLEGIAL EXECUTIVE BODY FOR THE KFUR FRONT. MEANWHILE, BECHIR GEMAYEL SAID THAT YOUNGER PHALANGISTS MIGHT PROVOKE A SERIOUS INCIDENT WITH SYRIAN SOLDIERS. THE GRAND MUFTI CONTINUES HIS EFFORTS TO ORGANIZE A NATIONAL ISLAMIC CONVENTION. THE MINISTER OF INTERIOR TOLD LOCAL TELEVISION ON JAN 28 THAT

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REJUVENATION OF THE INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES WAS HIS MOST PRESSING PROBLEM. DATT HAS CONFIRMED THE CLOSING OF SEVERAL ISSEGAL PORTS. END SUMMARY.

2. FIGHTING NEAR NABATIYAH.

A RELIABLE MILITARY SOURCE HAS REPORTED HEAVY ARTILLERY AND MACHINE GUN EXCHANGES ON JAN 29 AND 30 BETWEEN PALESTINIANS NEAR NABATIYAH AND CHRISTIANS ALONG THE QULAYAH-DEIR MIMAS AXIS. THE PALESTINIANS INITIATED THE FIRING AND THE SYRIAN ASF FORCES WERE EITHER UNABLE OR UNWILLING TO INTERVENE TO STOP THEM. ACCORDING TO THE SAME SOURCE, FORCES OF THE LEBANESE ARAB ARMY LEFT NABATIYAH FOR TYRE LAST WEEK, WHEN THE ASF FIRST APPROACHED THE TOWN. CONSEQUENTLY, ABOUT 60 PALESTINIANS HAD BEEN TERRORIZING THE TOWN'S RESIDENTS. ANTI-AMERICAN FEELINGS WERE REPORTED RUNNING HIGH, BECAUSE THE NABATIYANS BLAMED THE UNITED STATES FOR PREVENTING THE ASF FROM ENTERING THE TOWN. CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 00404 01 OF 03 311710Z

3. BEIRUT PRESS OPTIMISTIC ON THE SOUTH.

A. THE LEBANESE PRESS ON JAN 30 AND 31 GAVE FRONT-PAGE AND GENERALLY OPTIMISTIC COVERAGE TO THE SITUATION IN THE SOUTH. MOST PAPERS FOCUSED ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JAN 29 AND 30 MEETINGS BETWEEN THE US CHARGE AND FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS.

B. INDEPENDENT AN NAHAR REPORTED ON JAN 30 THAT THE US CHARGE HAD "RENEWED TO FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS AMERICAN GUARANTEES THAT ISRAEL WOULD NOT CARRY OUT AGGRESSION AGAINST THE SOUTH." IN RETURN, THE PAPER CONTINUED, FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS HAD EXPRESSED SATISFACTION WITH THE "ASSURANCES" GIVEN BY THE US CHARGE. ON JAN 31 BOTH AN NAHAR AND THE PRO-LIBYAN AS SAFIR NOTED THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTER HAD CALLED ON THE US CHARGE FOR THE "SECOND TIME IN 24 HOURS." AN NAHAR REPORTED WASHINGTON HAD COUNSELLED SYRIA AND

LEBANON TO WITHDRAW THE ASF FROM NABATIYAH "WITHIN A TIME LIMIT." AS SAFIR CITED FOREIGN MINISTRY SOURCES AS SAYING THE SITUATION IN THE SOUTH HAD BEEN "DEFUSED."

C. THE PRO-FEDAYEEN PAPER AL MOHARRIR REPORTED ON JAN 30 THAT THE INTERESTED PARTIES HAD DECIDED THAT "DIPLOMATIC CONTACTS SHOULD CONTINUE BETWEEN BEIRUT, WASHINGTON AND MOSCOW." ON JAN 31, AL MOHARRIR SAID THE TONE OF ISRAELI PROTESTS WAS BECOMING LESS SHRILL AS A RESULT OF AMERICAN DEMARCHES.

D. TAKING A CONSIDERABLY MORE ALARMIST TONE, THE PHALANGE JOURNAL AL AMAL ON JAN 30 SAID THE SITUATION IN THE SOUTH WAS "STILL EXPLOSIVE." ACCORDING TO AL AMAL, ISRAEL WAS PREPARING TO LAUNCH OPERATIONS AGAINST THE SOUTH AT ANY TIME.

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 00404 02 OF 03 311745Z

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00
INRE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
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O P 311600Z JAN 77

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2888

INFO SIT-REP COLLECTIVE PRIORITY 211

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

USNMR SHAPE BELGIUM

CINCUSNAVEUR, LONDON ENG

CINCUSAFE RAMSTEIN AB GER

CIA WASHDC

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 BEIRUT 0404

4. QUADRIPARTITE COMMITTEE DISCUSSES SOUTH AND PALESTINIANS.

A. THE QUADRIPARTITE COMMITTEE MET JAN 29 UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF PRESIDENT ELIAS SARKIS AND DISCUSSED BOTH THE SOUTH AND PALESTINIAN PROBLEMS, ACCORDING TO L'ORIENT-LE JOUR. THE KUWAITI REPRESENTATIVE, AMBASSADOR CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BEIRUT 00404 02 OF 03 311745Z

ABDEL AL-HAMID ABDUL RAZZAK, STRUCK AN UPBEAT NOTE AFTER THE MEETING AND TOLD THE PRESS THAT "EVERYTHING WOULD BE STRAIGHTENED OUT" IN THE SOUTH. HE ALSO SAID THAT THE LEBANESE AUTHOOITIES WOULD "OF COURSE" ESTABLISH A PRESENCE IN THE REFUGEE CAMPS "IN A SPIRIT OF COOPERATION" WITH PALESTINIAN AUTHORITIES.

B. THE PHALANGE'S VOICE OF LEBANON ON JAN 30 SAID THE COMMITTEE HAD PREPARED A WORKING DRAFT ON THE CAIRO ACCORDS AND THE SOUTH. ACCORDING TO THIS BROADCAST, THE WORKING DRAFT DEFINED PALESTINIAN RIGHTS REGARDING MOVEMENT IN THE SOUTH, ESTALLISHMENT OF CAMPS, TYPES OF WEAPONS, AND PROPAGANDA ACTIVITY.

5. ASF HEIGHTENS SECURITY.

THE ARAB SECURITY FORCE HAS ISSUED A COMMUNIQUE CALLING ON THE PUBLIC TO LOOK OUT FOR SUSPICIOUS OBJECTS, ACCORDING TO A JAN 30 STORY OF THE LOCAL NEWS AGENCY ARAB WORLD. THE REQUEST WAS MADE AFTER THE ASF HAD FOILED AN ATTEMPT TO BLOW UP THE CITY HALL IN SIDON ON JAN 29. SEVERAL ARRESTS WERE MADE, ACCORDING TO ARAB WORLD.

6. DIPLOMATIC AND OTHER TRAVELS.

A. AL MOHARRIR REPORTED ON JAN 29 THAT SECRETARY OF STATE VANCE WOULD VISIT LEBANON ON FEB 18. AN NAHAR, HOWEVER, SAID THE SECRETARY WOULD SPEND FEB 18 AND 19 IN BEIRUT, WHERE HE WOULD ATTEND A "DINNER PARTY GIVEN IN HIS HONOR BY PRESIDENT SARKIS."

B. ALMOST ALL PAPERS NOTED ON JAN 29 THAT FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTER LOUIS DE GUIRINGAND WOULD VISIT LEBANON FEB 16. AL AMAL SAID ON JAN 30 THAT A SOVIET EMISSARY WAS "EXPECTED TO VISIT LEBANON SOON." SEPARATELY, FORMER PRIME MINISTER SAEB SALAM RETURNED CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 00404 02 OF 03 311745Z

TO LEBANON ON JAN 30 AFTER A 40-DAY TRIP ABROAD TO TAKE
TREATMENT FOR AN EYE DISEASE.

7. ANOTHER KFUR FRONT MEETING.

THE FOUR PRINCIPAL LEADERS OF THE KFUR FRONT
(SULEIMAN FRANGIE, CAMILLE CHAMOUN, PIERRE GEMAYEL, AND
FATHE CHARBEL KASSIS), ALONG WITH EDOUARD HONEIN, MET
JAN 28. THEY ANNOUNCED TO THE PRESS AFTERWARDS THAT
THEY HAD DECIDED TO CREATE A "SPECIAL COMMISSION"
CHARGED WITH A "DUAL MISSION:"

-- FIRST, TO PREPARE FOR A FRONT MEETING
LARGER THAN THE ONE HELD AT BROUMANNA FROM JAN 21-23
(SEE JAN 24 SITREP). THE UPCOMING MEETING WOULD IN
TURN MAKE THE NECESSARY PREPARATIONS FOR A "NATIONAL
CONGRESS."

-- SECOND, TO PROPOSE A NEW "INTERNAL
STRUCTURE" FOR THE FRONT. THIS NEW STRUCTURE WOULD
ENTAIL A COLLEGIAL EXECUTIVE BODY WHOSE CHAIRMAN WOULD
ROTATE AMONG THE FOUR PRINCIPAL FRONT LEADERS.

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 00404 03 OF 03 311730Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00
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INFO SIT-REP COLLECTIVE PRIORITY 212
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 3 BEIRUT 00404

8. BECHIR GEMAYEL FEARS CONFRONTATION.

A. THE FOUR LEADERS OF THE KFUR FRONT ALSO
ANNOUNCED THEY HAD RECEIVED BECCIR GEMAYEL, HEAD OF
THE UNIFIED MILITARY COMMAND, FOR "A QUARTER OF AN HOUR"
DURING THEIR JAN 28 MEETING. BECHIR REPORTEDLY BRIEFED
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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 00404 03 OF 03 311730Z

THE FOUR LEADERS ON THE SECURITY SITUATION.

B. MEANWHILE BECHIR TOOLD AN EMBASSY EMPLOYEE ON
JAN 30 THAT RELATIONS BETWEEN PRESIDENT SARKIS AND THE
PHALANGE WERE DETERIORATING RAPIDLY. BECHIR CLAIMED
SARKIS "AND HIS SYRIAN ALLIES" WERE TRYING TOO SPLIT THE
FRONT. AS A RESULT, YOUNGER PHALANGISTS MIGHT ACT
RASHLY AND PROVOKE A SERIOUS CLASH WITH THE SYRIANS.

9. ISLAMIC CONVENTION PLANNED.

THE GRAND MUFTI SHEIKH HASSAN KHALED HAS BEEN PURSUING
EFFORTS TO ORGANIZE A NATIONAL CONVENTION INCLUDING
MUSLIMS OF ALL POLITICAL PERSUASIONS, ACCORDING TO
AL MOHARRIR ON JAN 29. THE GRAND MUFTI HOPED THE
CONVENTION WOULD OPEN IN FEBRUARY UNDER THE SLOGAN OF
UNITY AND REJECTION OF PARTITION, AL MOHARRIR CONTINUED.
ON JAN 28, HOWEVER, THE SYRIAN BAATH PARTY, ISSUED A STATEMENT
CONDEMNING CALLS FOR A NATIONAL ISLAMIC CONVENTION.

10. SALMAN TV INTERVIEW.

IN A JAN 29 INTERVIEW ONLOCAL TELEVISION, MINISTER OF
INTERIOR SALAH SLAMAN REITERATED THAT REORGANIZATION
OF THE INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES (ISF) WAS THE "MAJOR
PROBLEM OF MY MINISTRY." HE EXPLAINED THAT MORALE WAS
POOR, AND "MATERIEL -- ARMS, CARS AND EQUIPMENT --
INSUFFICIENT." SALMAN NEVERTHELESS PROFESSED OPTIMISM.
ACCORDING TO THE MINISTER, THE MAJORITY OF ISF MEMBERS

HAD REPORTED FOR WORK; THE POLICE STATIONS WERE OPEN; AND PRISONS WERE AGAIN TAKING IN OFFENDERS. MOREOVER, HE CONTINUED, JORDAN AND SYRIA HAD "ALREADY SENT ARMS." ASKED ABOUT THE CIVIL SERVICE, SALMAN COMPLAINED THAT "THERE WERE BUREAUCRATS EVERYWHERE POCKETING MONEY FOR NON-EXISTENT WORK." HE PROMISED THAT THIS "PERIOD OF PARASITISM" WAS DEFINITELY ENDED.

11. RETURN OF CIVIL SERVANTS.

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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 00404 03 OF 03 311730Z

OMAR MESSAIKE, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE, TOLD AN EMBOFF ON JAN 13 THAT THE GOL WOULD SOON SET A TIME LIMIT FOR ALL CIVIL SERVANTS TO RETURN TO WORK OR LOSE THEIR SALARIES. MESSAIKE SAID THE GOL HAD SO FAR REFRAINED FROM SETTING SUCH A LIMIT, BECAUSE THERE WAS INSUFFICIENT OFFICE SPACE FOR ALL THE WORKERS. ON JAN 29, HOWEVER, MESSAIKE TOLD THE PRESS THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD FINISH REPAIRING 90 PERCENT OF THE DAMAGED PUBLIC BUILDINGS IN THE BEIRUT AREA BY FEB 7. THIS WORK WOULD COST LL 15 MILLION AND PERMIT EMPLOYEES TO RETURN TO THEIR OFFICES. HE ALSO SAID THE ESTIMATED COST FOR REPAIRING BUILDINGS IN DISTRICTS OUTSIDE OF THE BEIRUT AREA WAS LL 5 TO LL 8 MILLION.

12. MORE ON PORTS CLOSED.

DATT VISITED THE ILLEGAL PORTS OF AQUAMARINA, TABURJAH, DBAYE, AND THE "FIFTH BASIN" OF BEIRUT HARBOR ON JAN 29 (SEPTTEL). NO CARGO SHIPS WERE VISIBLE, AND LOCAL RESIDENTS SAID ALL THE PORTS HAD BEEN CLOSED. TWO SYRIAN TANKS AND A SQUAD OF SYRIAN SOLDIERS WERE GUARDING AQUAMARINA. ANOTHER SQUAD OF SYRIAN SOLDIERS WAS GUARDING THE "FIFTH BASIN." DATT ALSO VISITED JOUNIEH PORT, WHERE ACTIVITY APPEARED NORMAL. A LEBANESE NAVAL OFFICER STATIONED THERE SAID THAT NO SYRIAN SOLDIERS HAD ENTERED THE JOUNIEH PORT. HE ADDED THAT IT WAS AN "OFFICIAL INSTALLATION" WHICH WOULD REMAIN OPEN. HOWEVER, THE NAVAL OFFICER BELIEVED THAT WITHIN TWO MONTHS ONLY SMALL CARGO SHIPS WOULD CALL AT JOUNIEH, WHILE LARGE ONES WOULD GO TO BEIRUT.

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